

Turner says 'breakthrough' confirmed Soviet presence

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Washington—Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of central intelligence, giving fresh details on the Soviet brigade in Cuba, said yesterday an "intelligence breakthrough" in August gave the United States persuasive evidence that Russian troops were back on the island and in a combat formation.

Addressing the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, he described the Soviet outfit as consisting of three infantry battalions, a tank battalion and the normal artillery, antiaircraft and anti-tank guns and support of such a unit. It has been said to number 2,000 to 3,000 men.

Admiral Turner did not elaborate on the "intelligence breakthrough" that finally produced what the administration accepted as "persuasive evidence." The modifier "persuasive" was applied first by President Carter in his Monday night speech. Earlier, officials had simply said the combat brigade was there—its presence "confirmed."

The intelligence chief said the detection process was greatly aided by reprocessing old data stored in computers and once thought irrelevant. By 1978, he said, there was "strong suspicion" the Russians were reintroducing combat troops into Cuba, and after the August conclusions were reached, it was accepted that the information had been there at least since 1978.

In early September, officials said the unit had been in Cuba since the mid-1970's or longer.

Admiral Turner offered fuller explanation on the question of when, and whether, Russian combat troops indeed left Cuba after the 1962 missile crisis.

He said the evidence is that all those in combat units departed in the 1963-1964 period.

In his speech, President Carter said there were 20,000 Soviet military men in Cuba at the time of the 1962 crisis and "most of them were also withdrawn [like the missiles] and we monitored their departure." Those remaining, he said, were thought to be advising and training Cubans and doing intelligence work.

This assessment left some questions because of a briefing by the then-defense secretary, Robert S. McNamara, in February, 1963.

At that time, Mr. McNamara said there were "four combat forces, roughly each the size of a reinforced battalion" in Cuba. There were other technicians and advisers associated with air units and training Cubans to use patrol craft and coastal defense equipment, he said.

Mr. McNamara put the combat personnel at that time at about 5,000, which he said comprised a "very, very small force," and said there were about 12,000 other Russian military men then in Cuba.

See Page 6

Sov Brigade

Questions and Answers on Issue of Soviet Troops in Cuba

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 — The month-long controversy over Soviet troops in Cuba was addressed by President Carter in a report to the nation on Monday, but some confusion seems to persist. What follows, in question-and-answer form, is a summary of the current situation.

Q. How many Soviet military personnel are there in Cuba?

A. According to American intelligence, there are 4,000 to 5,000 Soviet military personnel in Cuba.

Q. How long have they been at that level?

A. Since the end of 1962, when, as a result of the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw most of the 22,000 troops it had in Cuba.

Q. What has the recent controversy been about, if the number of military personnel has not changed in all this time?

A. The dispute has been over the role of those Soviet soldiers. Until the past summer, American intelligence believed that they were there either as military advisers, to help train Cuban forces, or to staff Soviet intelligence listening posts. But last summer, as the result of an accumulation of evidence, the intelligence people became convinced that 2,000 to 3,000 of the troops — a figure cited the other day was 2,600 — had been formed into a combat brigade at some unknown date.

Q. What are the components of this combat brigade?

A. The Carter Administration has not been consistent about this. On Sept. 5, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance said it consisted of "motorized rifle battalions, tank and artillery battalions, and combat and service support units." But on Monday, senior officials who did not want to be identified said the brigade has three infantry and one tank battalion and was commanded by a colonel. It is supposed to have 40 tanks and 60 armored personnel carriers, and be garrisoned in two locations.

Q. What has Moscow said about all this?

A. The Soviet Union — as well as Cuba — has denied that there are any Russian combat troops in Cuba. It says that the level of its military personnel has not changed since 1962 and that they are in Cuba solely to run a "training center" for Cubans. It says that the troops pose no threat to the United States or anyone else and have every legal right to be there.

Q. Which side is right?

A. It is difficult to make an independent assessment. The Administration has not made public the basis for its intelligence assessment, such as aerial photographs or intercepted radio messages. And the Cubans have not allowed independent observers to check on its denial. Senators who have been briefed have not questioned the findings.

Q. What did President Carter say about the troops in his speech on Monday?

A. He said, "We have obtained evidence that a Soviet combat brigade has been in Cuba for several years." He noted that, in discussions with Soviet officials and in an exchange of messages with Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, the United States had received "significant" assurances about the Soviet troops.

Q. What are those Soviet assurances?

A. That the unit is a training center and nothing more; that it will not change this function; that Soviet personnel in Cuba will not become a threat to the United States or any other country.

Q. Aren't those assurances more or less what the Soviet Union has been saying all along?

A. Yes.

Q. What then is "significant" about the assurances?

A. American officials explain that the assurances end a psychological uncertainty about the ultimate size of the reported brigade. Any increase in the size or fighting ability of the unit would be a violation of the assurances. President Carter, interpreting the Russians' assurance, said, "We understand this to mean that they do not intend to enlarge the unit or to give it additional capabilities." In addition, officials reason, the assurances allow the Russians to disband the reported brigade quietly, thus resolving the whole problem.

Q. Did Mr. Carter or Mr. Vance actually ask the Russians to withdraw the brigade from Cuba?

A. The Administration has refused to answer that question directly. Officials have left the impression that, if they did seek a pullout, they did not press the issue vigorously. Most of the diplomatic contacts appear to have been focused on finding ways, short of a complete Soviet withdrawal, to limit the reported combat ability of the troops.

Q. Didn't the Administration say that the status quo of the combat brigade was unacceptable?

A. Yes. On Sept. 5, Mr. Vance said, "Let me say very simply that I will not be satisfied with maintenance of the status quo." Two days later, Mr. Carter was more succinct: "This status quo is not acceptable." On Sept. 25, Mr. Carter said, "The status quo is not acceptable to us."

Q. Has the status quo changed so that the situation is now acceptable?

A. The Administration was never precise on exactly what it meant by the status quo's not being acceptable. If it meant that the brigade had to leave or that its combat ability had to be ended, then the status quo apparently remains unchanged.

Q. Does that mean that Mr. Carter failed in his goal to change the status quo?

A. Such an interpretation is possible, but the Administration contends that in fact the status quo has been changed in ways that are more acceptable to the United States.

Q. How has the status quo changed, in the Administration's view?

A. First, it says that the assurances on the future role of the Soviet troops end the uncertainty about the future size and function of the unit. Second, it says that the steps announced by Mr. Carter in the military and political field would offset the continued presence of the troops.

Q. Are the steps announced by the President really important?

A. Probably not, but they do highlight American power in the Caribbean and give a warning to the Cubans.

Q. Why has the brigade issue been linked by senators to approval of the nuclear arms treaty?

A. For a number of reasons. Opponents of the treaty have used the reported belated discovery of the brigade to bolster their case by raising questions about the ability of American intelligence to check on Soviet compliance with the treaty. They also contend that the treaty weakens the United States militarily at a time when the Russians are expanding in places like Cuba. Some senators, out of conviction or political necessity, are using the threat of treaty rejection to punish the Russians for what they consider devious behavior. Mr. Carter contends that the treaty serves the American national interest and should be approved without regard to the issue of Soviet troops in Cuba.

Q. Would there be much controversy over the Soviet troops if no arms treaty was pending?

A. Probably not.